

The World of Foreign Books

RUSSIAN BOOKS. Surveyed By AVRAHM YARMOLINSKY.

EARLY in August the great Moscow daily *Izvestiya* published a literary supplement surveying the past achievements of all the publishing agencies of the republic and their plans for the fall season. The plans are very ambitious and on a rather staggering scale. As for the past performances, they are after all perhaps more than what one could expect, in view of the prevailing industrial conditions. As one reads the various bibliographies and examines the volumes which find their way from different parts of Russia into this country one has a lively sense of the initiation of a busy reconstruction period.

Naturally enough the supplement gives the greatest amount of space to the Gosizdat (State Publishing House). An interview with its director is printed here, in which he states that the shift to the new economic policy of private enterprise has not had the expected effect on the publishing trade. Private publishers have not supplanted the State's organization. As a matter of fact the activities of the Gosizdat are on the increase. This he accounts for by the fact that in the publishing business the necessary capital is larger than what private persons in Russia can invest and the returns on the investment are slow. The attitude of the Gosizdat toward such private publishers as exist is not, on the whole, unfriendly. In carrying out its own extensive projects it goes so far as to farm out among the more substantial its surplus work. At the same time it gives no support to such private firms as seek large profits by putting out unwholesome trash for popular consumption.

II.

The Communists, however, are thoroughly alarmed by the advent of private publishers. In a speech delivered by Zinoviev before the All-Russian Conference of the Communist party and reported in *Izvestiya* August 9, the number of such private firms in Moscow is estimated at 337 and in Petrograd as 83. The Soviet leader must have based his figures on a very generous interpretation of the term "publisher," treating publishers of magazines on a par with publishing houses. He views this situation with apprehension. "In a single year," he says, referring to these facts, "the bourgeoisie has succeeded in outflanking us and in scoring a definite victory." Further, he declares himself in agreement with the opinion of an outside observer to the effect that literature in Russia "is freeing itself from the dictatorship of the proletariat and is often poisoned by a quite explicit hatred for the Soviet power." To counteract the influence of the bourgeois publications the eleventh convention of the Communist party passed a resolution regarding the necessity for broadening out the publishing activities of the party. Specifically they plan to issue a great deal of anti-religious and Marxian literature. In the first half of the current year the party agency, known as the Red Virgin Soil Publishing House, issued 114 titles, 1,733,900 copies in all.

Turning to the achievements and projects of the Gosizdat, one finds first of all that it is coping with the tremendous task of providing textbooks that will satisfy the new educational requirements. It must be remembered that the elementary and secondary schools of the usual type have been nominally replaced in Russia by the so-called "work schools." Here textbooks of the ordinary variety are unnecessary, inasmuch as the pupil, theoretically speaking, learns not through instruction, but through actual experience. The books required in such a system are reference works, methodological manuals for the use of the teaching staff, and popular science for supplementary reading rather than for study. As a matter of fact, such a thorough revision of the educational system in Russia remains a *pium desideratum*. Very few volumes of the required type have been published. Unable to secure the new school books, the Gosizdat has been forced to resort to a compromise. For the coming school year it has published editions of old textbooks revised in accordance with the official philosophy. This philosophy *Izvestiya* describes rather vaguely as "materialism in nature and history" and emphasis on "the revolutionary role of the

proletariat." In view of the reorganization of the universities, the textbooks for the higher education also need revision. The work of rewriting these hundreds of volumes is going steadily forward. Half of the 840 contracts for new books recently signed by the Gosizdat are for school books. Rigid supervision over the texts used in the classrooms is one of the means whereby the State exercises absolute control over education.

III.

Another important field of activity for the Gosizdat is the publication of scientific literature. Three series of scientific books have been begun. One is devoted to the description of Russian territory, with special attention to its natural resources. The second series will include the classics of natural science, and the third will consist of monographs on the problems of modern science. In collaboration with the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Gosizdat will handle a large work describing the present state and the recent achievements of Russian science and technology. This very important work will be edited by an autonomous body, created by the decrees of the Commissariat for Education, promulgated July 14 and August 2, and is to be issued in Russian, English and German. Among the individual scientific treatises which the Gosizdat has recently accepted for publication is a work by the famous scientist, Prof. I. P. Pavlov, entitled "Twenty Years' Experimentation in the Objective Study of the Behavior of the Higher Animals."

These are little more than plans and promises. For actual accomplishments in the way of publishing scientific literature one must turn to the private firms. It is to such a firm, for example, that we owe the ponderous volume on "Collective Reflexology" by the foremost Russian neurologist, Bekhterev, and Sorokin's important contribution to sociological literature. Also most of the works of literary scholarship, as, for instance, the recent additions to Pushkiniana, can be traced to the door of the private publisher.

The Gosizdat is the publisher of the large literary magazine *Krasnaya Nov* (Red Virgin Soil) and of the equally large bibliographical and critical review *The Press and the Revolution*. It also issues two reviews devoted to the history of the revolutionary movement in Russia and the Communist revolution. Further, it is planning the publication of a review dedicated to the arts. Before the war about eighty scientific and technical journals were issued in Russia. According to the interview mentioned above, the list of these periodicals has been revised and some twenty of them will be resumed immediately. Several of these special publications have already been revived under the revolutionary aegis. The historical field is the richest in this respect. Here one finds several new reviews of the highest standard of scholarship. One of the most recent additions to the journals of special scope is *The New East*, issued by the Society for the Study of the Orient. The political import of Russia's interest in the East is obvious. The opening editorial of this magazine insists that Moscow is the Mecca for the enslaved nations of the Orient. A knowledge of the East, the editor argues, is therefore incumbent upon Russia, "upon whom history has imposed the responsible mission of being the teacher and leader of backward peoples in their struggle for emancipation."

IV.

Belleslettres are not ignored by the Gosizdat, although most of the imaginative prose and the thin sheaves of verse in paper covers are issued by professional associations of writers and also by private publishers. The State firm has begun the publication of a new and elaborate edition of Pushkin. This is the commencement of a series of Russian literary classics. The general policy of the Gosizdat with regard to belleslettres has been formulated by its director thus: "The State Publishing House will not single out any definite literary group and will willingly assist any vital movement. We shall, however, assume an invariably negative attitude toward all manifestations of the mysticism and the hopelessness which has seized that part of our intelligentsia which cannot forget the bourgeois order."

Naturally enough, the section of economic-political literature receives much

attention. Three volumes of the thirty-two volume edition of the works of Marx and Engels have already appeared. Lenin's writings are to be published in twenty volumes, five of which are now on sale. It is characteristic that the works of the chief exponents of the materialistic philosophy are singled out for early publication.

Aside from the Gosizdat and the private firms one must also take into account the publishing activities of the various departments of the Government, as, for example, the Commissariats, the Supreme Council of National Economy, the Central Statistical Committee, &c. Then there are the co-operatives, which issue chiefly works on economics, and the various associations of authors which have been mentioned in another connection, and which bring out imaginative writings for the most part. Finally, there is the extensive literature issued beyond the Russian frontier by emigres.

V.

By far the most valuable and lasting contribution of the emigres is in the nature of memoirs. Ministers without Cabinets, Generals without armies, diplomats without governments, professors without chairs, statesmen without a state, turn their idle energies to recording their experiences during the revolution. If these reminiscences are not issued between covers they find their way into the so-called "Archives of the Russian Revolution," a Russian publication issued in Berlin under the editorship of I. V. Hessen, or into the pages of the monthly *Russian Thought*, published in Prague.

Five large volumes of the "Archives" have appeared to date. They contain a great deal of substantial material, bearing chiefly on the civil war. According to the editor, the aim of the publication is to furnish source material for a true history of the revolution. As a matter of fact, we have here almost exclusively the viewpoint of those who are out of sympathy with the present regime, so that one must trust the future historian to steer a middle course between history as it was written in these "Archives" and as it appears in such Soviet publications as "The Proletariat Revolution," "The Red Archives" and so forth. Perhaps the most telling and certainly the most interesting stuff in the collection is unpretentious narratives and diaries dealing with daily life in Revolutionary Russia. A fairly typical example is presented by Prof. Donskoy's story of his flight from Moscow to Berlin. This was originally written for the family records and is addressed to his baby grandchild. It opens thus: "My dear Lodochka: On a wintry evening in 1920, when you were not yet 2 years old, I sat with you in an unheated room in a small house in one of the suburbs of the city of Minsk. Dusk was falling. Your mother and your granny were fumbling over the stove and you, in a warm coat and a hat (sic), snuggled in my arms. . . . It was that evening that I resolved to describe in detail our flight from Moscow and the circumstances which led me to leave Russia, so that when you grow up and learn how to read and understand what you read you may decide for yourself whether or not your grandfather did right when he carried you away from Russia." There is a similar narrative, written by Gen. Wrangel's mother for her grandchildren, describing her life in Petrograd from 1918 to 1920. Volume IV, contains a study of the last days of the old regime by Alexander Blok, the late poet.

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